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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001186

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TAGS: PGOV KPKO CG

SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: MONUC SUSPENDS OPS FOR ELECTIONS;
KARIM MAKING NEW DEMANDS

REF: KINSHASA 1165

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: One week before the DRC's presidential and legislative elections, MONUC peacekeepers have suspended all offensive operations in Ituri District to focus on providing security and logistical support to election workers.

Meanwhile, militia leader Peter Karim, who agreed earlier this month to integrate into the Congolese military in exchange for the release of MONUC peacekeepers, has not yet arrived at the training and integration program, and is instead making new demands to Congolese officials about where such training should take place. As militia members in Ituri continue to surrender, the national agency in charge of demobilization has announced it will close all fixed demobilization sites in Ituri on July 26, raising questions about the status of demobilization efforts in the immediate future. Overall, however, the security situation in Ituri remains calm as elections approach. End summary.

OFFENSIVE MONUC OPS SUSPENDED

¶2. (C) On July 21, MONUC Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahboob Khan issued an order officially ending the last military offensive underway in Ituri, Operation Ituri Explorer, which had been launched May 20. Ituri Explorer's goal was to recapture the militia stronghold of Tcheli, which was seized by MONUC and Congolese army troops May 22, but later retaken by militia forces June 30. General Mahboob said all operations and actions in Ituri are now being directed towards "creating a favorable environment" for the smooth conduct of the July 30 elections. Mahboob said MONUC peacekeepers will continue to conduct patrols and area domination missions throughout the District. The focus of MONUC's efforts, however, will be to assist in securing polling sites and providing logistical assistance to the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) in the week leading up to the elections.

KARIM MAKING NEW DEMANDS ON INTEGRATION

¶3. (C) According to MONUC officials, Front for National Integration (FNI) militia leader Peter Karim is refusing to present himself or his militia members at the integration site established in Kpandroma, despite having agreed to do so earlier this month (ref A). Karim had agreed to send his forces to a demobilization point in Kpandroma (about 55 miles northeast of Bunia) and then on to a training camp located

south of Bunia. According to MONUC Chief Military Information Officer Lt. Col. Mike Burke, Karim is refusing to send his FNI followers to Bunia apparently out of fear that they will be arrested by Congolese authorities. Burke said he believes Karim is trying to concentrate his forces in and around the Kpandroma area where they have engaged in illicit commerce and smuggling through Uganda. Burke said Karim is insisting as well that he be given the rank of colonel in the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) before he goes any further in the integration process. According to MONUC and FARDC officials in Bunia, talks with Karim are still underway to resolve these issues.

¶4. (C) During the latest round of talks July 21 between Karim, the FARDC, MONUC peacekeepers and local officials, 64 child soldiers from the FNI were turned over to UNICEF and MONUC Nepalese peacekeepers. Twenty-seven child soldiers were also turned over July 20 to MONUC Child Protection officials in Kpandroma. By July 23, MONUC officials report that 48 children who had been received at the Kpandroma site were reunited with their families; another 10 children were transferred to a transit center in Mahagi to await reunification with the families.

SURRENDERS CONTINUE, CONADER TO CLOSE SITES

¶5. (C) Despite the deadline for disarmament having expired July 15, militia members continue to surrender to MONUC peacekeepers in Ituri. As of July 23, 3,923 militia members have voluntarily turned themselves in for integration or demobilization since the program restarted in June. In the

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past six weeks, nearly 2,200 weapons and more than 237,000 rounds of ammunition have been collected. Congolese demobilization officials report that 743 ex-combatants are currently undergoing orientation programs throughout Ituri, and more than 80 percent of all surrendered militia members have been processed through the initial demobilization process.

¶6. (C) Colonel Xavier Duku, the Ituri coordinator of CONADER (the Congolese disarmament agency), told MONUC officials July 24 that CONADER intended to dismantle all fixed demobilization points in Ituri beginning July 26. (Note: CONADER had always intended to close centers before elections and had originally planned to end the current demobilization phase June 30. It then extended the deadline to July 15 and prolonged the program again to accommodate the large number of militia members who were surrendering. End note.) When asked what would happen to ex-combatants who may surrender after this period, Duku reportedly said that was a decision for the GDRC to make. CONADER has planned, however, to establish "mobile" demobilization teams that will operate throughout the district and presumably demobilize any willing militia members. FARDC officials in Bunia said as far as they were concerned, the disarmament and amnesty deadline had passed, and the military is planning to conduct anti-militia operations "soon" after elections. Duku said, however, that militia members who have already surrendered and are at the transit and demobilization sites (or are waiting to enter them) would be processed and receive assistance.

ITURI RELATIVELY CALM BEFORE ELECTIONS

¶7. (C) MONUC and FARDC officials in Bunia said Ituri District has remained relatively calm in the period leading up to elections, and report that only a small number of isolated security incidents have occurred. The MONUC Human Rights division in Bunia confirmed July 24 that it is investigating reports that some FARDC troops may be responsible for the killing on July 22 of five IDPs (three adults and two

children) near Geti (about 25 miles south of Bunia), where some 400,000 have established a camp. According to initial reports, a group of about 100 IDPs left their camp in Geti in search of food in the surrounding villages, since humanitarian assistance has been slow in reaching the site. MONUC sources said it is not certain who exactly is responsible for the killings -- the FARDC or militia members -- but the incident could lead to greater unrest if security is not enhanced around the camp.

COMMENT: OPPORTUNITIES SLIPPING AWAY?

¶8. (C) MONUC must understandably concentrate in the immediate pre-election period on providing much-needed logistical support to elections preparations and security for polling sites. While it was expected, the decision to temporarily suspend offensive operations in Ituri could, however, signal a vulnerability that militia groups may well try to use to their advantage. Karim's new demands on how he will be integrated demonstrate that subduing and coopting the militias is not an easy task. The GDRC should insist at this point that Karim abide by the previous agreement he made when he decided to release the MONUC hostages in exchange for integration. Yielding further to his demands will only make it more difficult to coopt him and other militia leaders in the future. CONADER's decision to rely on mobile demobilization sites comes at an inopportune moment, particularly as the negotiations with Karim continue. If the mobile centers are not effective Ituri District could be left with a significant number of militia members who wish to surrender but cannot do so. Such a situation would risk letting an immediate opportunity to improve Ituri's security slip away. End comment.

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